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25 February 1955

PROJECT AQUATONE

1. The development and procurement phase of this project is now well underway. Design and specifications of airframes and of most of the specialized equipment are completed and firm contracts will soon be signed. Meanwhile, work is going forward at full speed and deliveries of aircraft will begin in mid-summer. Although the earliest operations will probably not be mounted from overseas bases until February or March of 1956, it is none too soon to give some attention to the requirements of the operational phase. Three kinds of preparations going beyond procurement must be undertaken with some urgency. First, research and planning must be, and indeed has been, set in motion in a number of fields, including: aeromedical, intelligence, meteorology, and logistics. Second, the recruitment, testing and training of pilots must be set in motion just as soon as possible. Third, since it is highly desirable to select well in advance the individuals who are to be assigned to the more important positions during the operational phase, firm plans for an organizational structure will soon be required.

2. The principal characteristics of the operation itself are already beginning to be apparent from preliminary planning. By the time a full operational capability (in terms of aircraft and personnel) has been developed, overflights under AQUATONE will be undertaken probably from three overseas bases at a time. Different bases will be active at different times and a total of five may be used before reasonably complete coverage of high priority targets has been achieved. The main bases will presumably be Air Force installations

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But in the case of at least three of the locations, it will probably be necessary to stage through advanced bases close to the borders of the Soviet Bloc. These will probably be occupied only for brief periods at a time and it will be necessary to transport both reconnaissance aircraft and personnel as well as certain maintenance facilities to and from these forward staging bases at frequent intervals.

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It is expected that, as overflights are conducted, many of them will be from a northern to a southern base or from a western to a Far Eastern base (rather than penetration flights which return to the originating base). Accordingly, there will be a "drift" of aircraft from certain bases to others and a resulting heavy requirement for air transportation to return aircraft and pilots to the predominantly originating locations. The scale of the operation will be increased by the desirability of flying many missions with two aircraft in order to reduce the danger of loss of an aircraft for unknown reasons and to increase both the kinds of intelligence coverage and the certainty of some coverage of all target areas.

3. This outline may serve to give an indication of the scale of the contemplated operation and of the scope of the planning and preparatory action and arrangements required. Procurement will continue to require attention for at

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least another twelve months. It must be anticipated that problems of design and of systems integration will continue to arise and that expediting will be necessary. In the recruitment and testing of pilots and selection of other personnel both Aeromedical and Personnel will be involved. In conjunction with Air Force Intelligence, information requirements of a character that could be met through photo-reconnaissance are being assembled as a basis for preliminary mission planning, for which officers with operational experience will be needed. They will require the results of available knowledge and possibly some further research on the meteorology of the area to be overflowed. As to the scale of the operation, when it is in full swing, approximately three-hundred men (a sizeable number of them civilian maintenance personnel in the employ of CIA) will be on active duty at overseas bases. They will have to include Air Force command technical and operational personnel and will need Air Force operational support in the form of transport aircraft assigned to the project, current intelligence, communications, weather information, and logistical support. The core of an operating organization must therefore be brought into being in the near future. It could profitably undertake the responsibility for the tests beginning in five-months' time.

4. Since planning for the operational phase of AQUATONE is only beginning it has not been possible nor is it necessary immediately to arrive at a precise division of labor between the CIA and the Air Force. It is expected that the actual overflights will be conducted as clandestine operations by the CIA with civilian personnel. Most of the maintenance personnel and facilities and much of the processing of the intelligence take will be provided by the CIA. Obviously, however, this Agency will require the services of a number of Air Force officers in addition to many of the kinds of support here listed. At each overseas base there will have to be either a joint Air Force/CIA unit or, following the precedent established in previous operations, a CIA unit and a parallel and complementary Air Force detachment, the two operating in the closest cooperation with one another. Because operations at the several bases will be intimately interdependent and because it will be essential to ensure the conformity of these operations with national policy, a considerable degree of central operational control will have to be maintained at a central headquarters in Washington. Here, too, what would appear to be required is either a joint Air Force/CIA Project Headquarters or a CIA unit paralleled by and working intimately with an Air Force unit in charge of Air Force participation.

5. Up to this point, all CIA activities under AQUATONE have been under the direction of the Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence reporting directly to the Deputy Director and the Director. Some CIA personnel are already assigned to the Project full time; much of the work is being done, however, within the regular components of this Agency subject to the direction of the Project Officer. In the Air Force, General Putt has been responsible for support of the Project with [redacted] as his Executive Officer. The cooperation of other offices has been requested and obtained as it was needed.

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This arrangement has worked well during the early phase of the project when the most important work to be done has been development, the crystallization of specifications, and procurement. Already, however, support has had to be sought from many components of the Air Force and, as indicated above, the project will soon pass into an operational phase. Accordingly, it is recommended that at this time a single officer be designated who will have responsibility for all of the activities of the Air Force in support of and as a participant in the project. Clothed with this authority and responsibility, the officer would be better placed to arrange in the most secure manner possible for access to the varied resources of the Air Force upon which it is hoped to draw. He should be authorized to join with the CIA Project Officer in developing organizational plans for approval by appropriate authorities in the CIA and the Air Force and he should be in a position to secure the assignment to the project at an early date of other Air Force personnel as required. The CIA is ready to take parallel action as required.

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